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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SHI'A PARTIES WARM TO OPEN LISTS, OTHERS UNMOVED

REF: A. BAGHDAD 01370
[B](#). BAGHDAD 01402
[C](#). BAGHDAD 01475

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Brian Shukan for reason 1.4 (b).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Politicians from the primary Shi'a parties over the past two weeks have shifted their message to express preference for a hybrid "open list" national election system and predict that a majority in parliament agree. Most Sunni and Kurdish members of parliament (MP), however, likely remain in favor of a "closed list" ballot, whereby voters select parties, not individual candidates. As Shi'a politicians attempt to revitalize the Unified Iraqi Alliance (UIA) -- the umbrella Shi'a electoral coalition created in 2005 that has since fractured -- open lists might be a convenient way to avoid the difficult task of determining before the election the allocation of seats among the often warring Shi'a parties. End Summary.

Shi'a MPs Shift toward Open Lists

[1](#)2. (C) Rival Da'wa and Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) members have told us over the past two weeks there is momentum among Shi'a parties in favor the electoral system used during the January 2009 provincial elections -- a hybrid "open list" in which voters can choose either an individual or a party. Shi'a MPs Ali al-Alaq (Da'wa), Hasan al-Sunayd (Da'wa), Tahsin al-Azzawi (ISCI/Badr), Muhammad al-Haidari (UIA independent), Falih al-Fayad (Reform Trend) and Deputy Speaker Khalid Attiyah (UIA independent) separately told Poloffs this month their parties and a growing number of MPs favor open list elections, with the caveat that discussions are ongoing among parliamentary bloc leaders. ISCI deputy chairman Ammar al-Hakim said on May 31 that open lists are preferable because it gives voters more choice. MP Iman al-Assidi (ISCI) told Poloffs in June the Iraqi "street" is in favor of open lists, even though she judges closed lists would be easier to administer. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and his confidants have long told us they favor open lists.

[1](#)3. (C) Over these same two weeks, there is growing discussion among Shi'a politicians in loQl media about a revitalized UIA. Da'wa, ISCI and, to a lesser extent, the Sadrists wish to avoid blame should the UIA dissolve; each party is positioning itself as the UIA standard-bearer. If negotiations fail to reconstitute the UIA for the 2010 election, they are most likely to fail over how to allocate before the election seats and leadership posts among the parties. Open lists help to avoid this sticking point by allowing the voters to handpick which candidates (and which parties) get seats in parliament.

Sunni, Kurds Unmoved

[1](#)4. (C) Sunni and Kurdish parties appear unmoved in leaning toward closed lists (ref A, B). Mustafa Hitti, MP from the

Sunni Iraqi Front for National Dialogue (IFND), told Poloff on May 29 he preferred closed lists because an open list is too complicated for illiterate Iraqis. Friad Rwanuzi the deputy leader of the Kurdish Alliance in parliament, and Osama Tikriti, the new Secretary General of the Sunni Iraq Islamic Party (IIP), separately told Poloffs in late May they were unsure which system would be adopted. Our sources speculate that prominent MPs, including Shi'a MPs, might ultimately support closed lists out of fear they would receive lukewarm support from the electorate if their names actually appeared on a ballot. Under this argument, the better bet for them would be to work within their party structure to remain high on the party lists. For example, Sami Atroshi, MP from the Kurdish Islamic Union, on June 10 told Poloff that parliament will not pass an open list system because incumbent MPs fear they will lose. Conversely, open lists could shake-up parties by recalibrating the popularity of its members.

Comment: MP Minds' Focused

15. (C) Before this shift among Shi'a parties, our impression was that most MPs were either leaning toward closed lists or ambivalent about what kind of electoral system to favor. If the Shi'a parties are serious about pushing for open lists, they still must broaden their appeal to some Sunni or Kurdish MPs or else disagreement could frustrate national election legislation. (As could the unresolved issue of voter registration in Kirkuk, ref C). Because the stakes of reelection are so high -- political balance of power, yes, but also the robust salaries, perks, and immunity offered to MPs -- there is a strong incentive for incumbents to write the rules in their favor. End comment.
HILL